

Carol S. Comer
Indiana Department of Environmental Management
30th Anniversary Speech to Employees
July 22, 2016

Good afternoon. I want to thank you all for taking the time to join me here in celebrating IDEM's 30th anniversary. Hard to believe it's been 30 years!

And some of you have been here since the beginning – maybe even before the beginning. Others, like myself, have only had a few years with IDEM, but we all share the same goals: implementing federal and state regulations to protect human health and the environment, while still allowing the environmentally sound operations of industrial, agricultural, commercial and governmental activities that are vital to a prosperous economy.

As I often say: you can't have a healthy environment without a healthy economy – and you can't have a healthy economy without a healthy environment.

And we have a healthy environment! That's something we should all be proud of.

As we talk about all the things we have yet to do, or wish we could do, we don't often pause to consider how far we have come, but I think it's something worth saying here today.

This is a big job, and we have been enormously successful. The proof is in the state of our environment. I don't need to tell you that the air, land and water in

Indiana are substantially cleaner today than they were when laws were first passed by Congress in the 1970s.

Waterways throughout the state now support fish and wildlife that had seemingly disappeared in the 1960s.

One example – a great example – and something to be immensely proud of – is the Grand Calumet River cleanup. Several of you have been working on that restoration for more than twenty years! Your work, dredging the sediments in the river, brought the river back to life and brought new life to the local community.

Similarly, long term control plans to address combined sewer overflows in our communities mean cleaner rivers and streams throughout the state.

Likewise, our land is demonstrably cleaner and healthier because of the work that has been done to address contamination throughout the state. Sites that were once plagued by the improper disposal of hazardous waste or sites with PCBs have made great progress. We even had a superfund site that went from posing a hazard to human health and the environment to being proposed as a 21,000 panel solar facility under state leadership.

Our air is demonstrably cleaner as well. Do you remember driving through clouds of pollution in northwest Indiana in the 1970s? I do! I spent my summers on my grandparents' farm in Rensselaer and on a good day you could smell Gary Steel Works all the way down there – an hour south!

But we worked with our industries, got them properly permitted and in 2009 all areas of the state met every national ambient air quality standard.

Today, we still have 93% of Hoosiers that live in counties that meet air quality standards – not because the air quality has gotten worse, but because the standards by which we judge air quality have become more and more strict.

As a result, residents are breathing cleaner air and more businesses are locating in our state.

Clearly, environmental protection in Indiana has come a long way. This progress is because of your hard work.

Whether you are an inspector, an attorney, an intern, or an administrative assistant; whether you work in finance, accounting, or information services; whether you are a permit writer, an emergency responder, an environmental education champion, or any one of the hundreds of other positions we have under IDEM's umbrella, you are an essential part of this agency's success!

Our whole is greater than the sum of our parts.

We've accomplished so much over the past thirty years. Yet, there is still so much more we want to do!

We're leading the nation in issuing Title Five Air Permits; but we still have work to do to ensure all areas of the state meet all air quality standards even as those standards become tighter and tighter.

We've worked with wastewater systems to build better treatment plants that meet ever stricter standards, yet we still strive for the day we have no CSO discharges.

We have established stringent regulations for CFOs in Indiana, yet we continue to seek safer, responsible, and more productive agricultural practices.

We have successfully promoted environmental education, yet every day we work hard to provide technical and financial assistance through programs like partners for pollution prevention, clean communities, and CTAP.

We've made great progress on all fronts.

And as we celebrate the past 30 years and look ahead to the next , I want to sincerely thank you for being part of this agency and for driving us forward so that the future of IDEM is just as remarkable as its past.

Please enjoy your time together this afternoon. This is for you.

Thank you all!